February 2026 League of Women Voters Lincoln Lancaster County Observer Corps Report

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Lincoln City Council 2/2/26

Were there any items of concern in terms of open meetings and good government?
Yes. There was an amendment for cleanup on item 1b 26R-42, and there wasn't a clear description of what the amendment was.

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

An interlocal agreement was approved with Lower Platte South Natural Resources District (LPSNRD) to control flooding along Deadmans Run. LPSNRD hazard mitigation plan to enable eligibility to apply for Federal Emergency Management Agency assistance was approved. A citizen spoke on a denied claim against the city for injury on a Star Tran bus, and a city attorney explained that since the city was not negligent, the claim was denied, and the next step for the citizen would be to take the issue to court. An amendment to a proposed development to change it from an apartment building to townhouses was approved. Tax Increment Finance (TIF) funding was approved for homeowners in the Hawley Historic District to use towards historically appropriate repairs (like wood windows, front porches). The issue had previously been discussed at a June 2024 council meeting. This approval was just to release the funds. A revised TIF approval was also granted for an apartment building at 18th and N Streets.

1st reading items of potential interest for discussion next week: special permit for Battery Energy Storage System near Waverly, annexation and zoning change at 70th and Yankee Hill where neighbors are concerned about trees at a site where a single-story office complex is proposed to be built.

Any general comments about the meeting?
I was disappointed not to hear any discussion about the historic district credit for homeowners, as this is a pilot project. Apparently, all the discussion happened at a June 2024 meeting.

Observed by Katie Bradshaw

Lancaster County Board of Commissioners 2/3/26

Were there any items of concern in terms of open meetings and good government?
No

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

Commissioners did not discuss among themselves any of the agenda items before voting unanimously for each of them (with the exception of the minutes, which one Commissioner abstained from voting on). Three employees (Tracy Anderson, Kristen Geisert,

and Karen; none said or spelled their own names) of the Lancaster County Extension Office spoke in support of the Commissioners proclaiming Feb. 12, 2026, 4-H Achievement Day (Agenda Item 4A). The employees effusively thanked the Commissioners for their continued support of 4-H and reported that they reached about 37,000 students in the county with about 2,000 volunteers last year. Several commissioners responded by saying they were 4-H youth themselves, and thanked the employees for their work. Agenda items 4D-4H were presented by Lancaster County Engineer Pam Dingman, who offered context about the funding requests. Lancaster County has, in the last decade, reduced the number of bridges rated "poor" (was not specified by whose standards, or what the criteria were) dropped from 32 to five, and, now, with 4D's unanimous approval, four. There may be a connection between how the Lancaster County Engineers are replacing WPA-era box culverts and our League's focus on sustainability, but I simply do not have sufficient information to make that determination. No commissioner offered a legislative update. One member of the public spoke about an ongoing issue with County vehicles parking in a driveway they ought not to be parking in; the speaker requested the Commissioners authorize signs in reinforcing that the driveway is to remain clear for resident access. I stayed for the Board of Equalization meeting; all parties were unanimously granted motor vehicle tax exemptions without presentation or discussion among Commissioners. There was no public comment at this meeting.

Observed by Amanda Irions

Lincoln/Lancaster County Planning Commission 2/4/26

Were there any items of concern in terms of open meetings and good government?
No

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

There was one agenda item beyond the consent item (where staff had no issues and there was no public objection). Commission voted unanimously to override staff objections to a waiver of rules for a small acreage development in far eastern Lancaster County. Developer plans to reconfigure six acreage lots at the intersection of 190th St and Highway 2. Staff wanted developer to have two potential access roads into the development, which would have required a rock road leading to nothing right now. Eventually it would have connected to private road on another portion of land to be developed. Commissioners said they were not going to require a $50,000 (developer estimate) road to nowhere.

Observed by Nancy Rose

Staff Meeting, Lancaster County Board of Commissioners 2/5/26

Were there any items of concern in terms of open meetings and good government?

Yes - Commissioner Vest was not in attendance. Commissioner Flowerday came in late and left early but did not miss any voting agenda items

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

Legislative Update by Kissel, Kohout, ES Associates. Several actions related to introduced bills at the legislature were voted on.

Quarterly Veterans Service Officer Update

Employee Health Benefits Update

New Deputy County Attorney, Amy Goodro, salary approved

Employee Health Wellness Update

Observed by Jean McGuire

Justice Council 2/6/26

Were there any items of concern in terms of open meetings and good government?
No

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

Department heads and elected officials gave brief reports, often with charts, indicating trends. I did not sit in a place where I could see everybody's name tags, so this report will not include the names of everyone who provided information.

Jail Director Brad Johnson said the jail population dipped below the previous year in earlier months, but climbed above the previous year numbers in July in August and in December. However, the average daily population is still below the previous year.

The racial makeup hasn't changed and minorities continue to be over, represented within the jail population. The wait for people needing to get into the original center continues to be below a high several years ago, but is slowly trending upward.

The jail recently started using a new phone and software program intended to reduce the cost to inmates from $.10-$.05 a minute for phone calls. They replaced every phone and rewired the jail using a system that had been programmed for smaller jails. So, there has been some initial startup issues.

County Attorney Pat Condon provided an update on a dashboard started in 2024 that provides a great deal of information about County cases and is available on the County Attorney's website

Public Defender Kristi Egger said the office had a successful warrant wipeout evening, where people could show up to take care of outstanding warrants without being arrested. However, many Hispanics were afraid to come, and some people were arrested outside the courtroom that evening. She also asked for more cooperation from the county attorney's office to reduce the time between arrest and being bound over to District Court, particularly for more minor offenses. She would like to see the time shortened from over a month to two weeks, but the county attorney's office has been unwilling to cooperate.

Lincoln City Police: Chief Michon Morrow said this is a chaotic legislative session. The sweep of cash funds (I think) will affect prevention funding from the Crime Commission. I did not understand the specifics.

Crisis Center: Scott Etherton said the center length of stay is at all time high and it is currently full. It sounded like they are having trouble getting people into lower levels of care. The police chief said they are averaging 5 to 7 hours before finding a placement for someone in crisis. Once recently it took 14 hours. That's time the person sits in a cruiser.

Sara Hoyle, human services director for city and county, said Square One, a collaboration of CenterPointe, Region V System, and the county, will open a youth and family crisis center this spring, with six beds (hopefully 24 hour care). It will be a higher level of care than Cedars and lower than Bryan.

Lutheran Family Services will soon have three mobile mental health vans operating and will be opening a walk-in crisis center for short-term crisis stabilization.

Observed by Nancy Rose

Lincoln City Council 2/9/26

Were there any items of concern in terms of open meetings and good government?
No

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

Discussion and public hearing on Battery Energy Storage System to be built in Waverly. One person was appealing the Planning Commission's approval of the special permit but unfortunately she did not show up for the hearing. I am not sure what her concerns were but may have been related to landscaping around the site. Paul Brown, who is with Energy Safety Response, spoke about safety issues. The council members seemed pleased with the safety measures laid out. There was some question about tornado impact. I'm not sure if that was addressed. The public appeal was denied by all members except Tom Duden. I was surprised he voted no and not sure what his concerns were because he felt safety issues were addressed. The attorney representing the company explained the landscape plans and the council was ok with them. Will see what Planning Commission says on the 24th.

There was a hearing on the Bishop Heights development. The developer wants to incorporate the old Wells Fargo Building in and reuse as a possible Mill Coffee shop which they state will meet the goal of the Comprehensive Plan of re-using existing buildings when possible. Also heard hearing on zoning change from agriculture to residential for single family housing at So. 79th and Ambrose Drive.

Any general comments about the meeting?

Still learning process for how items move through different hearings and readings on the agenda.

Observed by Julia Metcalf

Lancaster County Board of Commissioners 2/10/26

Were there any items of concern in terms of open meetings and good government?
No

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

Very little discussion by Commissioners. Lancaster County Election Commissioner Todd Wiltgen spoke on several bills before the Unicameral that affect the Election Commission, with the Commissioners supporting his positions.

Any general comments about the meeting?

Meeting very brief--less than 30 minutes--until Public Hearing on Battery Energy Storage System (BESS). Planning commission and engineering staff, Sofos/applicant, three opponents (neighbors) spoke against, no one spoke for or neutral for BESS. Three letters were received against (including one of the in-person testifiers). Commissioners asked some clarification on issues raised by testifiers. Meeting adjourned at 10:39 am

Observed by Judy Kelly

Lincoln Board of Education 2/10/26

Were there any items of concern in terms of open meetings and good government?

Yes. The LPS Board agenda could be easier to access online. A representative said she would look into that. The board president and vice president were absent so Barb Baier presided. A document for a major agenda item, the salary agreement for teachers/staff between the board and Lincoln Education Association (LEA), was not available to the public at the meeting even though some details were presented publicly. When requested, it was suggested that the document might be embargoed despite the public presentation. Agenda noted that a copy of the agreement would be available in the Associate Superintendent for Human Resources office upon request.

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?
A number of contracts for renovation/work on outdoor athletic fields moved forward.
Staff reported on initiatives outlined in the district's strategic plan.
The salary agreement summary presented publicly and the agenda item indicated action would be considered at the next meeting on the agreement which calls for a 4.20 percent total package increase which includes a 4.34 percent salary-only increase in 2026-27 and a 4.25 percent total package increase, including a 3.70 percent salary-only increase in 2027-28.

Any general comments about the meeting?
The meeting ran smoothly.

Observed by Betty Ann VanDeventer

Staff Meeting, Lancaster County Board of Commissioners 2/12/26

Were there any items of concern in terms of open meetings and good government?

Yes. Agenda for February 12 was not available online prior to meeting under Board of Commissioners Staff Meetings. I later realized, after picking up agenda at the meeting, that today was a mid year budget review meeting and the agenda and attachments were located under Board of Commissioners Budget Meetings. The meeting was much longer today because of mid year budget review and mid year requests. I was only able to stay until 10:15 and heard all of legislative update and most of mid year budget review but was unable to attend the mid year requests from various departments that was scheduled to last past 12:15. I don't know if there is a calendar that denotes when budget review meetings are scheduled so can find agenda prior to meeting. Commissioner Vest was absent.

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

Legislative Update by Kissel, Kohout, ES Associates. Several actions related to introduced bills at the legislature were voted on.
County Engineer Claim Review by Pam Dingman, County Engineer
Mid Year Budget Review by Dennis Meyer, Budget and Fiscal Officer and Kevin Nelson, Assistant Budget and Fiscal Officer
After break and starting at 10:30 were Mid Year Requests from various departments followed by future funding issues and projections

Any general comments about the meeting?

Salary and benefits were big part of mid year budget conversations.

This was first year County had to attend pink card meetings (refers to the joint public hearings mandated by state law when local political subdivisions, such as schools, cities, or the county propose to increase their property tax asking by 2% or more).

When budget review on Inheritance Tax revenue was presented, Commissioner Flowerday mentioned that Lancaster County does a good job with how the revenue is used (goes into a general fund for property tax relief) unlike most counties in NE who use the funds for other/special projects.

Observed by Diane Freese

Lancaster County Board of Commissioners 2/17/26

Were there any items of concern in terms of open meetings and good government?

No. One Commissioner was late, which necessitated a 9:05 a.m. start time. Two Commissioners (Christa Yoakum and Rick Vest) were not present.

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

Much of today's agenda was paying claims, including those submitted for goods and services and travel reimbursement that were submitted outside the 90-day statute. The Commissioners approved amending county contracts relating to sewer and disposal services, storm warning sirens, the family treatment drug court program, concrete and paving, and plumbing. In many cases, these approved amendments extended contracts, usually by another year. The Sheriff's Office presented requests for exam-preparation contracts and an updated laser-scanning system used at crime scenes and for reconstruction. The Commissioners approved a contract for $750,000 with Family Service Lincoln to assist Lincoln residents with their basic needs, such as food and rent assistance, at SquareOne. Commissioners voted 3-0 to approve each action item.

At the Feb. 24 meeting, Commissioners will have public hearings about the Southeast Rural Fire Protection District annexing a portion of the Bennett Rural Fire Protection District and about the close-out and discontinuance of the county-wide Community Development block Grant Housing Rehabilitation Program.

Observed by Amanda Irions

Lincoln/Lancaster County Planning Commission 2/18/26

Were there any items of concern in terms of open meetings and good government?
No

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

The commission approved request to annex 34 acres located northeast of S. 98th Street and pine Lake road, and to change the zoning from AG Agricultural to R—3 PUD. One neighbor spoke in opposition due to concerns about increased traffic.

The commission approved a preliminary plat for 63 single family lots at 17-1 Folkways Blvd.

The commission gave final approval to special permits for soil excavation for the Coffey Borrow Pit and for 11 dwelling units on property located near S. 148th and Highway 34/O Street.

The commission approved an amendment to Lincoln Municipal Code to allow farm wineries to sell food and alcohol produced offsite.

Observed by Janice Walker

Staff Meeting, Lancaster County Board of Commissioners 2/19/26

Were there any items of concern in terms of open meetings and good government?
No. Three of five commissioners attended: Sean Flowerday, Chelsea Johnson, Matt Schulte.

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

Most of the topics dealt with management and administrative functions, not policy. They were interesting but probably not related to League issues.

Matt Schulte gave a report on renaming County departments to make names more uniform and easier for the public to understand. The council voted two to one (Schulte the one) to table any discussion about renaming department until the County decided work on rebranding for the entire county, basically ending Schulte's renaming idea for now.

Schulte also provided information from Gallup about a successful workplace environment.

The board also heard reports on legislation, on outreach — primarily dealing with hiring —and on the juvenile diversion and human services annual report.

The board went into executive session for current and pending litigation.

Any general comments about the meeting?

Annual report on juvenile diversion programs obviously showed the success of these programs.

Observed by Nancy Rose

Lincoln Electric System 2/20/26

Were there any items of concern in terms of open meetings and good government?

No

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

reviewed budget for LES, reviewed Zoo Lights, report of 3,700 LES customer assistance phone calls, in 2025; held a closed mtg after general infor. then returned with misc. information.

Any general comments about the meeting?

Ken Wilson (Sierra Club) said that LES should make it easier for folks to contact them. He didn't explain how.

Observed by Alyx Knight

Lincoln City Council 2/23/26

Were there any items of concern in terms of open meetings and good government?

No. Bowers was absent.

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

All votes were 6 to 0. Nothing controversial that affected anyone other than a specific individual with a claim was on the agenda. The amount needed for a new contract for new fare collection system for StarTran was approved (will provide for payment by tap and pay plus by cash and

bus fare cards). Development requests were all approved on third reading without anyone testifying in opposition nor any substantive discussion.

Any general comments about the meeting?
The respect for each other, and for all of the speakers, by the city council members was evident and nice to see.

Observed by Shirley Williams

Lancaster County Board of Commissioners 2/24/26

Were there any items of concern in terms of open meetings and good government?
No

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

There were several amendments to County Contracts approved. There was a vote to approve the County Special Permit for the Battery Energy Storage Unit (BESS) with one dissenting member (Matt Shulte).

There was a public hearing to Closeout and discontinue the Community Development Block Grant Housing Rehab Program (CDBG). Dennis Meyer from the County Budget office testified that this was because most of the funds, $420, 000 were used to make improvements to 14 owner occupied units as intended by the NE Dept of Economic Development, mostly in Waverly area. They have one more project then will move the remaining funds, $43,000 to Southeast Nebraska Development District Housing Bridge Fund.

There was also a public hearing on the Petition for the Southeast Rural Fire Dept to annex a portion of the Bennet Fire Protection District. There were 25 households from Bennett that are petitioning for this but no one from these households showed up at the hearing. Bennett Fire Dept opposes, due to having to carve out one section of town that would be logistically hard for them to do. The Southeast Rural Fire Chief testified neutral.

Sean Flowerday spoke about LB1219 which limits the total amount of property tax by any political subdivision to 2% plus growth. He was not in favor of this but did not elaborate. Just said "it would be devastating" if it passed.

Any general comments about the meeting?
Interesting to hear discussion re: Rural Fire departments. I was impressed with the level of coordination between districts

Observed by Julia Metcalf

Lincoln Board of Education 2/24/26

Were there any items of concern in terms of open meetings and good government?

No

What were the main items of discussion at this meeting?

Presentation on Early Childhood Community Outreach

Proposed Negotiated Agreement with the Lincoln Education Association (LEA) which is the bargaining agent to negotiate salary, fringe benefits, etc. Agreement for 2026-2027 & 2027-2028 was reached and approved by the Lincoln Board of Education.

Any general comments about the meeting?
Well run meeting

Observed by Jean McGuire

Staff Meeting, Lancaster County Board of Commissioners 2/26/26
No report